

Melissa – Classroom Lesson Plan

Includes Virtual Author Interview

Book Synopsis

Melissa by Alex Gino (originally published as George) is a middle grade novel about a fourth-grade transgender girl who knows she is a girl, even though others see her as a boy named George. When her class plans a production of Charlotte's Web, Melissa wants to audition for the role of Charlotte, but faces resistance from peers and adults. Through friendship and quiet determination, Melissa asserts her identity. The novel explores themes of identity, acceptance, courage, friendship, and self-advocacy.

Banned / Challenged Status

Melissa is one of the most frequently challenged books in U.S. schools due to its portrayal of a transgender child and themes related to gender identity. Critics argue that discussions of gender identity may not be age-appropriate. Supporters emphasize that the novel promotes empathy, inclusion, and understanding, and provides representation for transgender youth and families.

Essential Questions

- What does it mean to live authentically?
- How can friendship support personal courage?
- Why is representation important for young readers?

Lesson Objective

Students will analyze how character development conveys identity and evaluate how the novel promotes empathy and inclusion through narrative perspective.

Lesson Structure (60 Minutes)

- Warm-Up (5 minutes): Why is it important for people to be seen and understood as they truly are?
- Direct Instruction (15–20 minutes): Examine character perspective and theme. Define key terms: identity, empathy, inclusion, self-advocacy.

- Guided Practice (15 minutes): In pairs, analyze a moment where Melissa demonstrates courage. Synthesis Question: How does quiet persistence function as strength in the novel?
- Independent Practice (15 minutes): Choice-based analytical or reflective writing (see below).
- Exit Ticket (5 minutes): Identify one example of allyship in the story.

Independent Practice Options

- Option A: Analyze how friendship influences Melissa's confidence.
- Option B: Reflect on the importance of inclusive classrooms.
- Option C: Write a short narrative about standing up for yourself.

Creative Interpretation Option

- Character courage timeline
- Identity affirmation poster
- Scene storyboard highlighting a turning point

All creative responses must include an artist statement citing specific textual evidence.

Reader Impact + Student Voice

- Why might this novel feel meaningful to some readers?
- How does the story build empathy?
- What role do allies play in supporting inclusion?
- How can schools create welcoming spaces for all students?

Intellectual Freedom Connection

Discuss why books featuring transgender characters are often challenged. Writing Prompt: Should schools provide access to literature that reflects diverse gender identities? Support your reasoning with textual evidence.

Author Interview

Author interview provided by UNBAN COOLIES.
Visit: <http://www.youtube.com/@unbanCOOLIES>

Lesson materials developed in partnership with UNBAN COOLIES.